By Martin Wilbur

Vivian Tai may not be a professional teacher, but she's keenly aware that children learn best when they are having fun.

She sees that with her own three children, and it is something she had in mind when starting her new business, Bits, Bytes & Bots.

Tai, a Mount Kisco resident and longtime software engineer, bought a franchise of the national company in November that introduces technology to children mainly between six to 14 years old through a producer of technology, said Tai, who emigrated from Malaysia while in high school. "So, you produce a movie, not just watching a movie.

While there may be a classroom setting for the classes, don't expect a rigid curriculum. Instructors are either current public school teachers or college students who have a passion for technology and teaching and relate well to children.

"Again, I have to remind everyone that this is not school," Tai mentioned. "We don't have a curriculum, we don't have a test—we have fun."

Among the sessions offered through Bits, Bytes & Bots are an introductory and advanced robot building class, a game creation and advanced game-maker class, and how to make an animated film. The robotic classes use the LEGO Mindstorms NXT robots and teach the children how to build and program while the game creation classes use the GameMaker software to help children create their own video games, complete with their own rules.

For the summer camp, the suggested age for most of the classes is between eight and 14 years old. There is a 3-D game design class and an animation class for 12- to 16-year-olds, as well as a class for six- and seven-year-olds.

"It's better than just buying a robot or just pushing a button and watching it do things," Tai said. "Now, you can press a button and make it do the things you want it to do."

Tai learned of Bits, Bytes & Bots late last year, just when she found out she was going to be laid off from Pfizer, where she worked for about four years. She quickly explored buying into a franchise out of necessity as much as out of passion.

"I found this and it was just, like, 'Wow!'," she said. "I have a passion for children, I love children. If I could spend all my time with them that would be great, but I don't like standing in front of a classroom teaching. I like to teach, but not like that."

Tai acknowledges that just because she finds technology exhilarating, not every child will take to it, at least not at eight years old.

With the popularity of the after-school classes and parties catching on, perhaps Tai's biggest problem at the moment is not having a permanent location. She works out of her home and travels to the schools and family's homes where she has booked a party.

"I'm still figuring out if it's worth my while to go through the whole rental process, to rent a place for a few hours to have a class," she said. "I actually prefer to do it at the school because then the kids all stay together; they have a good time interacting with each other."

For more information about Bits, Bytes & Bots, contact Tai at 914-218-8175, or e-mail her at westchester@bitsbytesbots.com.